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UNTOUCHABLE ARTIFACTS

Museums push for more documentation, P9

YAK CHIC
EXOTIC WOOL
FINDS ITS WAY
TO FASHION
WORLD, P15



HIGH FLYERS



Kite-flying can be a consuming passion as Chitraleka Basu finds out at the Weifang International Kite Festival, which had attracted an ardent gathering of international hobbyists.

It was a bit of a surprise to find Qian Jianguo on stage at the ceremony of the 28th Weifang International Kite Festival early this year. Qian, a diminutive man of 68, performed his own little act, twirling and gliding on stage, imitating the motions of his modest eagle-shaped kite — a self-designed contraption that can fly even without wind to keep it afloat. We had met him earlier in the day, and he never gave a hint that he would be a star turn among the musical celebrities with huge fan bases in the audience.

His self-effacing attitude, we found, was endemic among most Weifang residents. They let the kite take center-stage and build their lives around it.

Take Tang Ang, for instance, whom we met at the Weifang Fuyanshan International Kite-flying Ground, minutes into the first day of the festival.

Standing underneath a glowing morning sky crisscrossed by whizzing kites of all shapes — centipede dragons, long-tailed phoenixes, angular stunt kites, even a motorcycle — Tang tells us about his strong attachment to kites.

He had quit a good job with a phone-parts manufacturing company and taught himself to speak English so he could be a better advocate for Weifang kites beyond Chinese shores. Tang, in his 30s, now works as a sales manager with a kite-manufacturing company that supplies its products to Houston in the US state of Texas.

“Weifang, as you know, is the kite capital of the world, and being a Weifang native, I wanted to be a part of its kite culture,” he says.

Qian Jianguo was a late entrant to this culture. He took up the craft after retiring from a factory in 2005 — “hoping to add a bit of color to my life” — and learned it by keenly watching others. Now, of course, it’s the only life he knows.

“I find it’s a great way to make friends across the world through flying kites. I feel I am working as a cultural ambassador for the country, helping foreign friends to know about Chinese culture,” he says.

The Malaysian kite festival held at Johor Bahru in February 2012 was a high point in his career.

“There was no wind and mine was the only kite that could take off. All cameras were trained on me.”

It took Qian about three years to develop that special technique, but it was worth the effort. “At that moment, I felt like a kite myself, soaring in the sky.”

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sundaytalk



RAJOY



JOHNSON

“These are not pleasant measures but they are necessary.”

Spanish Prime Minister **MARIANO RAJOY**, announcing a 65-billion-euro austerity package to avert a financial collapse in the country

“We are about to stage the greatest show on Earth in the greatest city on Earth.”

London Mayor **BORIS JOHNSON** as the British capital prepares to open the Olympic Games on July 27

“When people start working together, they will learn from each other and do good things.”

Washington DC Mayor **VINCENT GRAY** after a trip to Dalian, saying economic development is a good way to strengthen US-China relations

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